
FORUM

Teaching anthropology in Poland

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In Poland, anthropology has never been taught as a mandatory or optional course outside university education. Some attempts to introduce anthropology at a level of secondary school were made at the beginning of the 1990s by the late Krzysztof J. Brozi, university professor of philosophy and cultural anthropology. In his arguments in favor of anthropology Brozi insisted on the general humanistic value of anthropology as a discipline studying cultural diversity, and its popularity in the West, particularly in the United States. He trusted that in the period of enthusiasm for sweeping revolutionary changes in all domains of social life this move would bring expected results, however it was an illusory hope. As far as we know, these attempts did not reach beyond discussions in small academic circles and did not reach the governmental level essential for anthropology to be introduced in the country. Furthermore, most policy makers and representatives of educational institutions in the central administration, independently of their political orientation, probably saw philosophy as the humanistic subject that should be taught in secondary schools rather than anthropology. Instead, it is religion and not anthropology that is offered as an elective subject in schools (Buchowski, Chlewińska 2011).

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Despite efforts of hundreds of anthropologists, the popular perception of the discipline in Poland is still closer to the studies of folkloric and exotic traditions rather than to a social science helpful in engaging with important social issues. Ethnologists are often seen as “dealers in traditions and in exotica”. As connoisseurs in these fields, they are usually asked for advice when it comes to question about intangible or material cultural heritage. They are still rarely called upon to comment on sociocultural dimensions of issues such as healthcare, poverty, multiculturalism or migration. It has to be said, however, that a progress in this respect has been slowly but steadily made, and in recent years anthropologists have been increasingly used as experts on current social and cultural issues.

The conservative national political formation which came to power in 2015 is not interested in introducing to schools a discipline, which advocates multiculturalism, relativism, hybridization of cultures and social groups and a society open to sociocultural diversity. Instead, the social function of ethnology/anthropology should be the promotion and conservation of local traditions, which, of course, is nothing bad in itself¹. This political milieu combined with the prevailing perception of anthropology could possibly strengthen the situation in which anthropological ideas can be only smuggled into school curricula subjects such as history or civic education by individual teachers.

On their part, anthropologists try to fill the gap by making their impact in schools by organizing special courses on multicultural education and education, frequently in ethnically diverse schools (including schools that have immigrant student population). The same principle applies to different educational initiatives coordinated by ethnographic museums. Special agreements with particular schools are also reached, which enable such educational activities². For the time being, anthropological education of educators seems to be the most popular and accessible form of sneaking anthropology into people’s minds.

Thus, while it has hardly any formal presence in Polish schools, anthropology is a popular university subject future Polish teachers often come in

1. It is worth mentioning that current Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło studied ethnology at Jagiellonian University in Cracow and delivered her MA thesis on the tradition of making nativity cribs in Cracow. She shares strong anti-immigrant attitude and opts for policy aimed at strengthening national exclusivity.

2. A recent agreement signed in 2016 by the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and High School in Konin, to hold “anthropological class” with lasting for two years courses in anthropology is possibly and hopefully a harbinger of such evolution towards teaching anthropology at the level of secondary education.

touch with during their university studies. Introductory courses to sociocultural anthropology are often taught at Schools (Faculties) of Education as a part of the social science and humanities core curriculum, together with courses in philosophy, psychology or sociology. This institutional presence of anthropology, combined with the sustained popularity of educational studies as an academic choice for a great number of students in Poland (64,000 enrollments in 2013) creates a great opportunity for anthropologists to cultivate anthropological sensibilities among Polish teachers, giving the subject of anthropology a voice in the public sphere.

Through our academic teaching practice, we have found that perhaps the most valuable aspect of anthropology for future educators lies in the anthropological «way of seeing» (Wolcott 2008), namely the critical cultural approach that anthropologists take in apprehending and describing social reality, ascribing cultural meaning to the phenomena they observe through ethnography. The process of learning how to see, interpret and study the world as a cultural construct – learning how to be an anthropologist – takes many years and for many of us it is a lifetime endeavor. When we teach anthropology as a social science/humanity core in interdisciplinary programs, however, we do not have the luxury of such time; if we are lucky, we get a thirty-hour slot (the equivalent of a one-semester course) during the entire university career of our students. The question of effectiveness of our teaching to make an impact on helping future educational professionals see the world as a culturally plural entity and bring this way of seeing into their classrooms is of crucial importance, and this is a central task for us as anthropology professors.

In developing our courses, therefore, we strive to communicate anthropology through deliberations centered on anthropological research that has teaching, learning and upbringing in different cultures as its focus and on cultivating the students' abilities to make connections and cross-cultural comparisons to their own contexts. In the process of constructing the curriculum, relevance to our students' aspirations and lived realities is the key.

We use a variety of ethnographic research to introduce basic anthropological notions centered around cultural critique, including Margaret Mead's classic ethnography *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Mead 1986), which deals with a subject that future teachers find deeply relevant – the upbringing of children and education of adolescents. It allows to bring into the students' home realm the idea that culture is influential in people's upbringing and in our discussions, students come to the critical awareness that the way children are brought up in Poland is a product of specific cultural conditioning. Our discussion on the cultural embeddedness of upbringing further deepens

through research of educational anthropologist George Spindler and his notions of cultural transmission, cultural compression, continuity and discontinuity, and cultural therapy, which allow us to discuss anthropological categories of rituals and rites-of-passage, highly relevant for the discussion of educational processes. We also build on school-based anthropological research whereby anthropologists study schools as sites of production of good state citizens, which often exclude students of minority groups. We discuss research by Ray McDermott studying schooling as a process of reproducing social inequity through the process of cultural programming, which for Polish students opens a way to understand how unconscious teachers' cultural discrimination can contribute to the school failure of minority children in Poland – primarily, but not exclusively, the Roma.

Other areas of anthropological research that works well for our students are studies that focus on ethnicity and perceptions of citizenship as important factors in school-based cultural production processes. For example, the work by Thea Abu El-Haj (2007) focusing on discrimination of Palestinian youth in American high-schools, in particular following the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, allows us to considering how similar dynamics are at play in Polish schools *vis-à-vis* minority students. The invisibility of social class as a problem of schooling is another issue that we can elicit through anthropological lens. Through the work of Bradley Levinson and Beth Rubin, we can look at how youth in Mexican and North American schools assume agency and control over identity-shaping processes *vis-à-vis* dominant school-based policies. The discussion of these texts forces Polish students to confront social differences among students in their seemingly homogenous Polish classrooms and consider how these might affect the dynamics of the educational process, distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful students and impacting the formation of their civic identities.

We also focus on transformative pedagogical practices, drawing on inspirational texts situated in the tradition of educational action research and engaged anthropology, including research by George and Louise Spindler's cultural therapy – a method whereby anthropologists expose the cultural underpinnings of the teacher's discriminatory practices to herself.

Texts by Norma González and Luis Moll show that culturally sensitive teaching should take into consideration the household and community background of students (González *et alii* 1995), helping teachers become researchers of their students' worlds to make their teaching contextually relevant to their students. Pauline Lipman's action research, on the other hand, shows the connections between school assessment, school closings and urb-

an politics, requiring students to look differently at the dynamics behind the epidemic of school closings in Poland, going beyond the economic considerations to the sociocultural conditions and costs.

In conclusion, we want to stress that while anthropology is not a strong presence in Polish schools, it can play an important role in the educational trajectory of students of education – future teachers and educational practitioners. In order to make anthropology meaningful for students of educational studies, we must take into consideration the disciplinary context in the construction of our courses. If anthropology and its ethos and methodology are to play their critical role for future educators, it is important to build their understanding on material that is relevant to their professional concerns. Being an academic teacher of anthropology for students of educational studies provides a rare opportunity for engaged anthropological work.

Cultural comparisons, ultimately lead students considering the “Other” in their classrooms. Anthropology can also help today’s teachers and educational practitioners move beyond mastering the skills of teaching particular subject areas to being transformative professionals who are able to situate their teaching in the changing world around them and their students (Sachs 2007). Teaching anthropology to students of pedagogy opens significant opportunities for engaging anthropology with interdisciplinary dialogue and educational processes that are relevant for the nurturing of open societies, fostering the tradition of a public engaged anthropology.

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